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Our Own Freedom is in Jeopardy

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April 14, 1964

Our Own Freedom Is In Jeopardy

Today is the day.

This Thursday, April 16, is the day members of the Board of Institutions of Higher Learning meet in Jackson reportedly to fire Dr. James W. Silver of the History Department of the University of Mississippi.

We will not accept—until they prove otherwise—the idea that members of this board, one of the most important in the state, will do such an unwise, foolish, even stupid thing, as firing Dr. Silver.

If they do, and reports are they will, then these board members will have proved beyond the shadow of any doubt, that Mississippi is indeed a Closed Society, as Dr. Silver contends.

Also, they will have shown they either do not know or understand the meaning and purpose of an institution of higher learning, or they are less than courageous in failing to stand up for what they know to be right—specifically, academic and personal freedom to voice the truth in this closed society.

Now, dear reader, if you do not know what a "closed society" is, it is not our fault. Foreseeing the day when such action might be contemplated under pressure by this state board, we ran last fall in several installments the entire, offending speech of Dr. Silver which was made November 7th in Asheville, N. C. before members of the Southern Historical Association. At the time he was the retiring president of that organization and this was the presidential speech.

His speech was literally the "straw" that broke the camel's back. Dr. Silver's enemies, which any outspoken person acquires over a period of years, first howled with rage and then jumped up and down with glee. Now they had him. Since that time he has been subjected to unremitting attacks by his enemies and certain peanut politicians seeking newspaper headlines in what they regard as a popular cause.

Because press coverage of Dr.

Silver's speech was either non-existent in the local, daily press, or completely inadequate, we deemed it a public service to print his entire speech so that our readers could know what he actually said. We were the only editor in the state to do so.

We believed then, as we do now, that truth should be told—that Mississippians are entitled to know the truth, even when they appear not to want to hear it. We know this is the only way we can guard our own individual liberty and freedom and that of our readers. If the voices of dissent are silenced, as some are seeking in the attempted dismissal of Dr. Silver for stating unpopular truths, then all our freedom is in jeopardy. And it is just a matter of time until freedom is dead in Mississippi.

We are dangerously close to that already.

If you don't believe it, now think back and determine the last time you have voiced, in the company of other Mississippians, an opinion which you KNEW to be unpopular with the power structure of your own little community or state.

In Germany, under Hitler and his Gestapo, they called this the "police state."

In Mississippi today, in the era of the Citizens' Councils and other terrorist, extremist organizations, Dr. Silver calls our situation "a closed society."

For sounding this alarm, which should penetrate the consciousness of even the most un-thinking, we should be eternally grateful. We are forever in his debt.

Instead, some want him banished from the state.

Shut him up, silence those who do not, will not, cannot go along with the crowd—all those who value truth, personal freedom and integrity above personal, material gain. be it professor, minister, teacher, doctor, lawyer, editor, or plain, private citizen.

What, then, Mississippi?

Hazel Brannon Smith